

What We Believe

*The doctrine
of David S.*

This page presents the foundational teachings of the Apostolic (Oneness Pentecostal) faith topic by topic, and goes deep. Following this site's method, each teaching is stated as it is published by the body or author that holds it - the Articles of Faith of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ (ALJC), and the Worldwide Pentecostal Fellowship (WPF), together with the movement's standard writers - rather than in the site's own voice. The deepest single source drawn on here is David S. Norris's *I AM: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (2009), the work of a professor at Urshan Graduate School of Theology, whose argument - built, in his publisher's words, on "hundreds of academic works" - is that the first-century church held a specific confession of Jesus Christ, one quite different from what the church later came to believe, and that this confession is biblical, historical, and logical. Scripture is quoted from the King James Version.

The One God

The first article of faith in each of the three organizations is the oneness of God. The UPCI's Articles of Faith confess "the one ever-living, eternal God: infinite in power, Holy in nature, attributes and purpose; and possessing absolute, indivisible deity," and state that "this one true God has revealed Himself as Father, through His Son, in redemption; and as the Holy Spirit, by emanation." The ALJC's Articles use the same formulation, adding one phrase: God has revealed Himself "as Father in creation, through the Son in redemption, and as the Holy Ghost by emanation." The WPF's Articles state the same doctrine in more expansive prose: God is "one in number and unity," Jesus Christ is the Word become flesh, and the Holy Spirit is God indwelling the believer. None of the three statements uses the language of three "persons."

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:" - Deuteronomy 6:4 (KJV)

The I AM

Norris's theology begins where God's self-revelation begins: with the Name. When Moses asked who was sending him, God answered with a name that is also a confession of being itself:

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." - Exodus 3:14 (KJV)

The prophets take up the same self-declaration. In Isaiah, God repeatedly names Himself with the Hebrew *ani hu* - "I am he" - and binds it to His absolute uniqueness: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isaiah 43:10); "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). Isaiah's God permits no rival and no partner: "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Isaiah 45:5).

Jesus takes the declaration onto His own lips. In John's Gospel the Greek form, *ego eimi* - "I am" - echoes Isaiah's: "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24); "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). When the arresting party in Gethsemane heard the words, they "went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). Norris's research - his doctoral dissertation was titled *No Other Name*, and *I AM* is the book that followed it - traces this identification through the whole argument of Luke and Acts: the Jesus of the New Testament is not a second god beside Yahweh, nor

a junior partner in a divided deity, but Yahweh Himself come in flesh, confessed by Thomas in the words the church has never improved on: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The risen Christ of Revelation speaks with the same voice as Isaiah's God: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).

Norris insists that the question is not what later centuries built on this confession but what the confession originally was. The earliest church's faith was apostolic before it was creedal: the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20), and Jesus prayed "for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). On Norris's reading, a doctrine of God must rest on the profession of that first community - the community of Acts - rather than on the creeds and councils that came after it.

Creator and Redeemer

How is God known? Norris follows a line of recent scholarship that defines God's identity not by abstract attributes but by His acts in the biblical narrative. Richard Bauckham argues that two things belong to God and to no one else: He is creator, and He is sovereign - and that Jesus shares both, and so belongs within the divine identity. Norris accepts the method and amends the second term: in the narrative, the act that most defines God is that He is redeemer. On this reading, the creation itself was made with the redeemer in view: in the beginning was the logos - God's intent, His redemptive plan - and then came God's enacted action, the incarnation. Paul writes what Norris calls a New Testament Shema: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Corinthians 8:6) - and states the confession beside its mediator in a single breath: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). The oneness of God and the genuine humanity of the mediator are not in tension in this theology; each requires the other.

God Invisible, God Seen

The same scriptures that confess one God confess that He is Spirit and unseen: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24); He is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God" (1 Timothy 1:17). Yet the Bible's God is also a God who shows Himself - in theophanies in the Old Testament, where the Angel of the LORD speaks as God and is worshiped as God, and supremely in Jesus Christ, "who is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). John states the resolution in a sentence: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). God is not seen in His essence; He is seen in the Son.

The Word Made Flesh

On the Son, the Articles teach that Jesus is God manifested in the flesh: "in Him (Jesus) dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9); "Jesus in His humanity was man; in His deity was and is God." The great confession is Paul's: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

Norris reads the prologue of John as the covenant plan of God in miniature. Its poetic structure turns on a hinge - John 1:12-13, the creation of the covenant community: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Word that "was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) is, in Norris's phrase, the man Christ Jesus in whom Yahweh dwells: the prologue's focus is not cosmology but redemption - not creation in general, but the new creation. The Sonship itself begins at the incarnation. The angel's word to Mary turns on a "therefore": "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Jesus is Son because of the

miraculous conception; as God, He is the eternal Father of lights, who was never born and cannot die.

David K. Bernard's *The Oneness of God* (1983), the standard systematic statement of this doctrine, develops the Articles' formulation at length. Bernard is careful to teach that God's manifestations as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simultaneous, not successive - his stated distinction between the biblical doctrine and the ancient error of successive modes.

Repentance

Repentance stands first in the plan of salvation published by all three organizations. In the UPCI's Fundamental Doctrine it is the first element of "the Bible standard of full salvation": repentance, baptism in water, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The ALJC's Apostolic Doctrine of New Birth and the WPF's Articles place the same three elements in the same order. The command itself is Peter's, preached on the Day of Pentecost and echoed in the Lord's commission that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." - Acts 2:38 (KJV)

Norris's covenant theology frames what repentance is. In his reading of John, covenant is God's idea and always begins with His call: God calls, and people respond - and the response is a genuine act of the will, neither predetermined nor coerced. "God so loved the world" is a universal call, extended to "whoever" will answer it. Repentance is that answer at its first step: the called sinner turns. It is a death to the old life - Paul joins it to burial: "we are buried with him by baptism into death" (Romans 6:4) - and it is worked by godly sorrow rather than mere regret: "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

The UPCI's Articles state that pardon and cleansing from sin come by genuine repentance and confession, and that the repentant sinner is justified by faith (Romans 5:1). The UPCI and ALJC Articles of Faith also carry a matching article on the grace of God: salvation is God's gift, received by faith and obeyed in the new birth, but it is not a license to continue in sin - in their shared wording, a Christian "to keep saved, must walk with God," and continued unrepented sin ends in being "eventually lost." The WPF Articles reviewed publish no separate article on perseverance.

Water Baptism in Jesus' Name

All three organizations teach that water baptism is by immersion, is for those who have fully repented, and is administered in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. The UPCI's Water Baptism article reads: baptism is "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Acts of the Apostles 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5; thus obeying and fulfilling Matthew 28:19." The two commands are held together: Matthew 28:19 gives the command - "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" - and Acts 2:38 records how the apostles carried it out, in the name - singular - of Jesus.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" - Matthew 28:19 (KJV)

One wording difference runs through the published statements. The UPCI's formula is "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"; the ALJC Articles and the WPF Articles read "in the name of Jesus Christ." The baptism commanded is the same; the formula as printed differs by the word "Lord."

The Name Invoked

Why a name at all? Norris's answer reaches back to how Yahweh deals with His people. In the Old Testament, God puts His name where His presence is to be found. He proclaimed the name Himself to Moses: "And the LORD passed

by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). The priests were charged to invoke it over the people: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:27). Where God's name is placed, Norris writes, God is present - and Israel, the land, and the temple all bore the name as the sign that they belonged to Him.

The name of Jesus, on this account, is not in competition with the name of Yahweh; it flows out of it. When the Jerusalem council asked how Gentiles could be in covenant without circumcision, James answered from Amos: God had rebuilt the tabernacle of David so that "all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called," might seek the Lord (Acts 15:17, quoting Amos 9:12). Norris argues that the council understood the prophecy as fulfilled in what the church was already doing - invoking the name of Jesus over converts in baptism. James's own epistle speaks of believers by that very description: "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" (James 2:7). The baptismal record of Acts is uniform: converts were baptized with the name of Jesus orally invoked over them, and the baptized called on the name themselves - "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Peter's exclusivity belongs to the same doctrine: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The idiom behind all of this is older than Moses. Genesis records that in the days of Enos "men began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26) - a phrase whose Hebrew form, *liqroh beshem YHWH*, Norris shows is found in no neighboring language and carries a sense the English can miss: not only that people called on the name, but that the name was invoked upon them, and they were called by it. In his 1998 paper "None Other Name," the research paper in which the argument of I AM first appeared, Norris gathers the significance under three heads: the invoked name declares God's ownership of His people (they are His "peculiar treasure," Exodus 19:5), His redemption of them, and His presence with them. Baptism in Jesus' name carries all three into the New Testament: "When we invoke the name of Jesus," Norris writes, "the Lord is announcing His ownership on us" - or, as he puts it at the paper's close, "we don't own the name - the name owns us." The power, he is careful to add, lies in the Name itself, not in any pronunciation of it.

Initiation into Covenant

Norris devotes a chapter of I AM to the baptismal formula and another to baptism as "initiation into covenant in Acts." The claim, developed further in his work on John, is that baptism in Jesus' name is the God-given door into the new covenant - the outward act in which the called and repentant person is brought into the covenant community and, in his phrase, into the very identity of God. Jesus joins the two births in one sentence: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Norris reads the sentence straight through to Pentecost: John 3:5 and Acts 2:38, he argues, can and should be linked - and Paul supplies the summary in Titus 3:5, where God "saved us... by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is not a bare symbol added to a salvation already complete without it; in the pattern of Acts it is the covenant's initiating act, for the remission of sins, in the name that was invoked over Israel's heirs and is now invoked over Jew and Gentile alike.

Bernard treats baptism at length in *The New Birth*, his book-length study of the new birth of water and Spirit (John 3:5). Among the early Oneness writers, Oliver F. Fauss's *Baptism in God's Plan* argued the historical case: that baptism in Jesus' name continued for at least the first hundred years of the early church, and that the first genuine account of the Matthew 28:19 words used as a baptismal formula appears much later, in Justin's *First Apology* (about A.D. 153). Notes from the Elton, Louisiana, Bible Conference of December 1915 - preserved in Fauss's *Buy the Truth and Sell It Not* and quoted by Bernard - put the movement's founding conviction in one line: "God's pattern is Acts 2:38."

The Holy Ghost

The third element of the new birth in all three statements is the baptism of the Holy Ghost - the birth of the Spirit of

John 3:5: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." All three organizations teach that those who receive the Holy Ghost speak with other tongues, as the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost and as believers did throughout the book of Acts.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." - Acts 2:4 (KJV)

The Baptizer with the Holy Ghost

John the Baptist's whole ministry pointed past itself: six times the New Testament repeats his confession that he baptized with water, but the Coming One would baptize with the Holy Ghost (John 1:33). Norris observes that Jesus baptized no one with the Spirit during His earthly ministry - indeed He could not, for the gift waited on His glorification: "the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). The Spirit was given at Pentecost, by the ascended Christ, as the inaugural act of the new covenant age - the age Ezekiel foresaw ("A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," Ezekiel 36:26) and Joel promised, and which Peter announced as fulfilled on the day the church was born (Acts 2:16-21).

"I Will Come to You"

John's farewell discourse speaks of the Spirit's coming in terms that bind it to Jesus Himself. Jesus promises "another Comforter" who will abide "for ever" (John 14:16), and in the same conversation says, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18), and again, "we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). Norris reads these as equivalent statements of one event: the coming of the Spirit is the coming of the Father and the Son to dwell in the believer. When a person receives the Holy Spirit, Norris writes, that person receives the same Spirit that operated in Jesus - and is brought, in the Spirit, into covenantal and even metaphysical inclusion in God. The gift is not an impersonal power but God's own presence, promised by Jesus as His own return to His people.

An Initiating Experience

Norris stresses that in Acts the baptism of the Spirit is never a second, optional stage added later to a completed conversion; it is the initiating experience of the new covenant itself. Drawing on James D. G. Dunn's study of Spirit baptism, he notes that Acts knows no distinction between an initial reception of the Spirit and a later baptism of empowerment: the Spirit "falls," believers are "baptized with the Spirit" and "filled with the Spirit," and the varied language describes one initiatory gift. Pentecost is therefore conversion of the most important kind - entry into the eschatological covenant.

The pattern is repeated in Acts: at Caesarea, the household of Cornelius received the Holy Ghost - "for they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God" (Acts 10:44-46) - and at Ephesus the Holy Ghost came on the disciples of John, "and they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (Acts 19:6; see Acts 19:1-6). The UPCI's Articles state the expectation plainly: "It is scriptural to expect all who receive the gift, filling, or baptism of the Holy Spirit to receive the same physical, initial sign of speaking with other tongues." All three statements also distinguish this experience from the gift of tongues of 1 Corinthians: the two are the same in essence, but different in use and purpose.

The three statements name the tongues experience with three different terms. The UPCI calls it the "initial sign"; the ALJC calls it the "evidence"; the WPF calls it the "normative initial sign." Bernard has stated his preference for the UPCI Articles' word, "initial sign," distinguishing the sign at receiving the Spirit from the abiding evidence of the Spirit's presence - the fruit of the Spirit, supremely love, and the pursuit of holiness.

Holiness

All three organizations teach holiness as doctrine, not preference: holiness of heart that is reflected in the outward life. The command is Scripture's: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"

(Hebrews 12:14). The UPCI's 1977 Holiness position paper frames the doctrine as first inward - the Spirit's indwelling through the new birth - and necessarily outward, in modesty, separation from worldliness, and a maintained distinction between men's and women's dress and hair.

"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." - 1 Peter 1:15-16 (KJV)

Where the three differ is in how specifically the standards are written, and where they are written. The UPCI states them in a list in its Articles of Faith and in position papers - including the 1977 Holiness paper (modesty of dress under Deuteronomy 22:5, no ornamental jewelry or make-up, men's short hair and women's uncut hair as the covering of 1 Corinthians 11) and the 2014 Gender Distinction paper, which restates hair and clothing as the two visible symbols of gender distinction; the standards bind credentialed ministers, while application to members is pastoral in self-governing local churches. The ALJC's Holiness article is written in principles and citations instead - modesty of dress, conversation, and manners, citing 1 Corinthians 11:6, 1 Timothy 2:9-10, and 1 Peter 3:1-4, and stating the dress distinction of Deuteronomy 22:5 as a rule that "will not change through all generations." The WPF carries the most explicit code of the three inside its Articles themselves: modesty of dress, rejection of jewelry, make-up, and dyes, separation from worldly entertainment, and the same distinction of "man's cut hair and the woman's uncut hair." None of the three statements addresses facial hair.

The Church

The church, in these statements, is the body of Christ - "he is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18) - and entry into it is by the new birth: of the first converts it is written that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47), and that they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The UPCI's 2019 Church Government paper is careful to add that the organization "does not claim to be equivalent to the body of Christ," and that no one must belong to the organization to be saved or to have a valid ministry.

Norris's reading of John gives the church its theological definition before its institutional one. At the center of the prologue's structure stands the creation of the covenant community - those who "received him" and were "born... of God" (John 1:12-13). God calls through Jesus, Jesus sends the disciples as He Himself was sent (John 17:18), and the church carries the same call to the world; its authority is the apostles' word, preached and written (John 17:20). The church is therefore not a human organization built around a doctrine, but the eschatological community God creates by His call - entered by the new birth, marked by the invoked name, and filled with the Spirit.

All three bodies practice the two ordinances instituted at the same supper: communion - the bread and the fruit of the vine partaken of literally as emblems of the broken body and shed blood of Christ - and the washing of the saints' feet (John 13). The obligation wording differs. The UPCI calls foot washing "a divine institution" and holds up the Lord's example to follow. The ALJC states it most strongly: foot washing is "as much a divine command as any other New Testament ordinance." The WPF notes that Scripture gives no direction on the frequency of communion, recording that many have found observing it at least annually, or at special times of need, to be unifying and strengthening.

In government, the UPCI describes itself as basically congregational in the local church and connectional above it, with affiliation of a local church optional. The ALJC's churches are "sovereign within themselves," and its organizational membership consists of ministers and missionaries rather than congregations. The WPF is constituted as a fellowship of ministers, not a denomination.

Sources

The statements above are drawn from the following published documents. UPCI Articles of Faith - the text of the

UPCI Manual as reproduced by the Apostolic Information Service from the 1995 Manual (UPCI does not currently post the full Articles text on its website; where UPCI has spoken later in official position papers, those papers are cited with their years). ALJC General Constitution, revised May 2026, Articles of Faith. WPF Articles of Faith, as published on the fellowship's website. David S. Norris, *I AM: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: WAP Academic, 2009), together with the research behind it: his paper "None Other Name: Invoking the Name of the Lord," presented at the Oneness Symposium (St. Louis, 1998) and published by the Apostolic Information Service, and his doctoral dissertation, *No Other Name: A Socio-Historical Approach to the Argument of Luke-Acts* (Temple University, 2000) - and his forthcoming *The Christology of John: A Oneness Pentecostal Reading*, draft chapters of which were presented at the Urshan Symposium in 2025. David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (1983), *The New Birth*, and *Understanding the Articles of Faith*. Oliver F. Fauss, *Baptism in God's Plan and Buy the Truth and Sell It Not*.